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**Perspectives on  
Minority Officer Success Rates  
in the Marine Corps**

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# **Perspectives on Minority Officer Success Rates in the Marine Corps**

**James H. North • Donald J. Cymrot • Karen D. Smith  
Neil B. Carey**



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**Center for Naval Analyses**

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## Introduction

Each year, the Marine Corps screens about 2,000 officer candidates through its Officer Candidate School (OCS). For example, more than half of the FY 1991 candidates did not become commissioned officers; either they failed to complete OCS, or they later failed to accept a commission. Such a high attrition rate is worrisome—it is expensive to recruit and to screen officer candidates. OCS attrition has been especially high among minority candidates, and the Marine Corps has been charged with discrimination. A differential continues at the next phase of officer training, The Basic School (TBS), where the average class rank of minority candidates is lower than that of white candidates.

Recent controversy over lower rates of minority success in OCS, TBS, and early career promotions highlights the need to learn the underlying issues, problems, and mechanisms. In 1992, the Marine Corps began to examine the relatively poor outcomes<sup>1</sup> of minority officers early in their careers. It had observed, for example, that a larger proportion of minorities than whites failed to complete the initial pre-commissioning course at OCS. Efforts to understand this gap continue.

The Marines convened a special Quality Management Board (QMB) at Quantico to investigate the issue. The QMB commissioned CNA to conduct analyses to determine measurable factors that might explain outcome differences. Although the differential outcomes were reduced, a gap continued to exist even among groups of otherwise equally well qualified individuals. While the Marine Corps has taken positive actions, which seem to be paying off, USMC and CNA efforts continue to understand the gaps.

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1. Throughout this paper, we refer to outcomes rather than performance to avoid prejudging the source of the differences.

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On December 17, 1993, the Center for Naval Analyses (CNA) held a conference to probe this topic from many different perspectives.<sup>2</sup> Participants in the conference included military and academic experts as well as members of the CNA staff.<sup>3</sup> During the morning session, the staffs from OCS and TBS briefed the conference participants; the afternoon session was a round-table discussion.

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2. Although the Marine Corps cooperated with our efforts, the conference was entirely an independent CNA effort. The views expressed in this paper do not necessarily reflect those of the Marine Corps.
  3. Pages 4, 5, and 27 through 29 identify the conference participants.
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## **Issues of concern**

Dr. Pierre and Brigadier General Walls were among the participants in the CNA conference who identified two issues of concern for the Marine Corps: public confidence and readiness.

### **Public confidence**

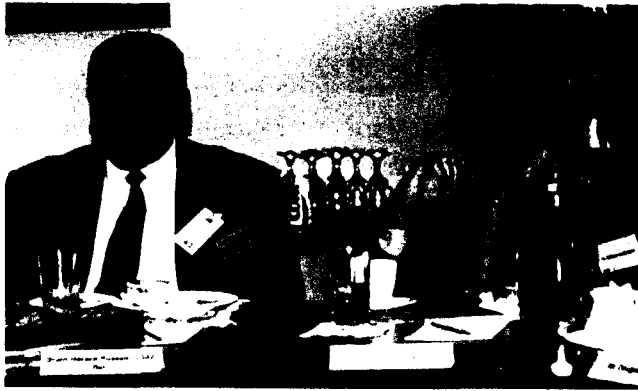
As a public institution, the Marine Corps must build and maintain public trust. A loss in public trust could affect both the funding level for its program and its ability to attract and retain volunteers in both the enlisted ranks and officer corps. If the public develops a perception that the Marine Corps is fostering unfair or unequal treatment (consciously or unconsciously), the Marine Corps risks a loss of public confidence.

### **Readiness**

Even if the Marine Corps is treating its minority officers fairly, a nearly all-white officer corps could threaten its viability as an effective fighting force in the future. Shifting demographics could affect the long-run composition of the Corps. At present, the officer corps is less than 10 percent minority, and the enlisted force is about 30 percent minority. Projections indicate that over the next two decades a large share of new entrants into the labor force will come from minority groups. Given the Marine Corps' success in recruiting and retaining minorities in its enlisted force, this shift in demographics is likely to be reflected among its enlisted ranks. However, present accession levels and success rates for minorities in the officer corps suggest that the percentage of minorities is not likely to increase significantly. The result of these trends is that an increasingly minority enlisted force soon will be led by a nearly all-white officer corps.

The racial and ethnic tensions in this country—and the even worse schisms in the rest of the world—create reasonable doubts about the effectiveness of such a force. In a decade or so, large differences in the racial makeup of the enlisted and officer ranks could pose severe readiness problems.

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Brig. Gen. Russell and Dr. Aronson



Brig. Gen. Walls



Mr. Sims and Dr. Steele



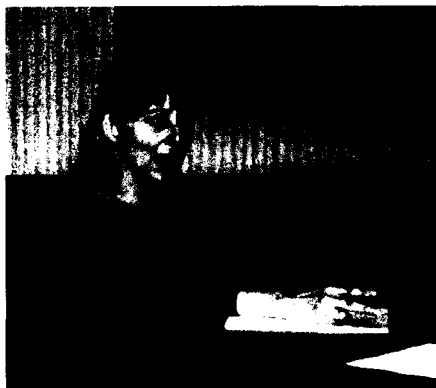
Lt. Col. Davis



Dr. North and Dr. Cymrot



Maj. Doll and Dr. Carey



Ms. Smith



Dr. Thompson and Dr. Pierre



Dr. Thompson and Brig. Gen. Russell



Dr. Adedeji



Dr. Carey, Capt. Samples, and Mr. Wells

Appendix A contains more information on conference participants.

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## **Previous findings and remaining questions**

In December 1992, the Marine Corps asked CNA to examine the outcome gap. Our initial study examined both recruiting and achievement in officers' early career milestones.

### **Recruiting**

We found a poor allocation of recruiting efforts for minorities, so we recommended (and the Marine Corps implemented) a reallocation of the minimum number of officer candidates that each district is supposed to recruit for various racial and ethnic groups. We based our recommendation on the proportion of DOD officer accessions and college graduates from each group in each recruiting district. The goal of this shifting allocation was to increase both the quality and quantity of minority recruits. The effect of this recommendation was a shifting of the black allocation from the north and west to the southeast, and the Hispanic allocation from the east and north to the south and west.

### **Early career milestones**

We analyzed outcomes for different racial and ethnic groups, statistically adjusting for a variety of factors, such as scores on achievement and physical fitness tests, the program of entry, and the competitive ranking of the college involved. The analysis showed the following differentials between blacks and whites, which the statistical controls could not explain:

- An 8-percentage-point lower completion rate for blacks at OCS. (This finding applies to male officer candidates only. In a separate analysis of female officer candidates, we found no difference in completion rates by race.)
- A 22-percentile lower average class rank for blacks at TBS.
- A 6-percentage-point lower promotion rate to captain for blacks. (The differentials between Hispanics and whites were similar but generally smaller.)

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The Marine Corps believes that some of the data supplied for this part of the study were flawed. In a new study, CNA is reanalyzing this issue with new data.

### **Possible interpretations**

There are a number of possible explanations for these outcome gaps. Among the benign possibilities is the absence of data on some relevant variables. For example, previous academic performance, such as college grade point average (GPA), is probably a good predictor of academic performance in TBS. However, the Marine Corps doesn't regularly collect data on the GPA of its entrants from the Naval Academy or NROTC. Thus, we used other measures (e.g., SAT scores) as incomplete proxies for academic capabilities. Also, for promotion to captain, we were unable to obtain performance indicators after TBS.

Another possible explanation is that other variables may be immeasurable, particularly social-psychological factors, such as motivation or self-esteem. Although they might explain some or part of the outcome gap, they could not be included in a statistical analysis.

More troubling, the outcome gap might be caused by deliberate or unintended discriminatory behavior against minorities. Instructors or fellow students—a portion of the evaluation of leadership ability is by peers—might rate minorities more harshly or place extra pressures on them, or perhaps the general culture of the Marine Corps might seem exclusive rather than inclusive to minorities.<sup>4</sup>

Given the unexplained gap of the statistical analysis and the importance of the issue to the Marine Corps, CNA embarked on two-pronged approach to further research. First, in conjunction

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4. Data from recent years show that the smallest gap in factors determining TBS rank is in the leadership grade—the most subjective portion of the evaluation.

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with a follow-up study by the Marine Corps, we are collecting and analyzing more complete data to consider additional predictors that might narrow or eliminate the existing unexplained portion of the outcome gap. Second, our conference focused on the qualitative aspects of this issue.

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## **Causes and possible remedies**

During the conference, the discussion focused on three broad areas: curriculum, selection and preparation, and leadership and culture. Based on these discussions, the group identified a number of causes and possible remedies to the outcome gap. This section discusses each of these possible causes and the possible remedies, focusing first on the candidates and then on the more general institutional setting of the Marine Corps.

### **Poor preparation**

#### **Explanation**

Black officer candidates are more likely than whites to enter OCS and TBS with weaknesses in their preparation, weaknesses such as deficient swimming skills, unfamiliarity with rifles, or the lack of camping and scouting experience that teaches land-navigation skills. As a result, some minority candidates must catch up; this extra effort detracts from performance in other areas.

A much higher proportion of minority candidates than white candidates sign contracts less than three months before going to OCS, thus reducing their ability to prepare physically and mentally. CNA has found that, for enlisted Marines, a delay between signing the contract and shipping to the recruit depot is positively correlated with success. In addition, as the conference participants suggested, minorities may not be given a full picture of what is expected of them at OCS and TBS—recruiters don't want to scare them off.

#### **Possible remedies**

Participants listed four ways in which the Marine Corps could better prepare officer candidates:

- Describe, in detail, what to expect and what is expected of them.



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- Hold recruiters (known as Officer Selection Officers, or OSOs) accountable for candidates' success at OCS.
  - Give minorities more swim training or swim practice before TBS.
  - Require a minimum length of time between contract signing and attending OCS.

Brigadier General Walls (USMC, Ret.) expressed an interest in holding OSOs accountable for the success of a candidate at OCS. More accountability would increase the incentive for recruiters to fully prepare candidates and to judge the strength of candidates interested in becoming Marine Corps officers.

To sustain the flow of information between OCS and the recruiting service, and to maintain some corporate knowledge, the Marine Corps recently established an OCS advisory board. Members include the commanding officer of OCS and members of the recruiting service, as well as other interested parties. The board will exchange information and discuss relevant issues, which should help the recruiting service in its efforts to inform candidates of what is expected of them at OCS.

OSOs now receive a video on the TBS curriculum, and they are briefed periodically on changes at OCS and TBS. Candidates should be given a detailed description of what they will do and how they will be evaluated once they enter these schools. OSOs can present the material as a challenge to the candidates and should convey their confidence that the candidates can do it—that they wouldn't have been selected for OCS if they couldn't do it. In this way, OSOs will both prepare candidates for the challenge and also build up their self-esteem. An example of the kind of information to present is that candidates are overtasked intentionally at OCS to see how they set priorities and make decisions.

The Marine Corps recently moved the swim test from the beginning of TBS to near the end, thus giving officers with little swimming experience more time to improve their swimming

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skills before the test. However, if recruiters encouraged their candidates to get swim training before TBS, the candidates wouldn't have to spend time in the pool when they could be preparing for classes. Participants thought such initiatives were a good start toward improving preparation, but noted that monitoring these efforts is essential if they are to be sustained.

## **Stereotype vulnerability**

### **Explanation**

Participants described OCS as embodying a "culture of worthlessness," in which the basic presumption is that all trainees are "maggots." The purpose of this approach is to place candidates in highly stressful situations to simulate the stress of combat. Dr. Steele (Professor of Psychology, Stanford University) argued that this approach could have a greater negative impact on blacks because it resonates with the stereotype that blacks are less competent than whites. If a black fails, the presumption is that he or she did not have the ability to succeed. For whites, failure is most likely to be viewed as an individual failure. Hence, the minority may carry the burden of stereotype vulnerability in addition to the individual burden of possible failure.

### **Possible remedies**

The Marine Corps could infuse its atmosphere of individual competitiveness with positive expectations. Both Dr. Steele and Dr. Aronson (Professor of Psychology, University of California, Santa Cruz) argued that stress need not be counterproductive. Rather, within a stressful context, the Marine Corps needs to view all officer candidates' abilities as expandable and to communicate to all candidates that it believes in their ability to succeed. To master difficult material, the Marines must invest themselves in the role of an officer; they must identify with the Marines. To do so, the minorities need to feel that at least one significant individual believes in their worth and ability to succeed. Dr. Steele talked about the film *Stand and Deliver*, which

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is based on a true story. In that film, Jaime Escalante successfully teaches advanced-placement calculus to low-achieving Hispanic high school students. Mr. Escalante achieves his aim in a stressful environment by communicating high expectations and his belief in the worth of each student. He begins by telling his students that they are descendants of the people who invented the concept of zero and were among the world's best mathematicians of the time.

Brigadier General Russell (USAF, Ret.) mentioned the success of Dr. Philip Uri Treisman in teaching calculus to black students at the University of California at Berkeley. Dr. Treisman often challenges these students to do more difficult math than is ordinarily required in freshman calculus. He emphasizes students' learning abilities. They are recruited to do honors work in their first calculus class. Students with SAT scores as low as 300 are given work that builds on their skills with the presumption that they can succeed. In these approaches, teachers acknowledge that students may be behind at the beginning of the course, but avow that they are talented and that the course will speed their advancement.

As stated earlier, stress is not necessarily counterproductive. According to Dr. Steele, "Success at difficult things breeds success." Thus, the standards of excellence in Marine Corps training should not be lowered. Rather, the key to the special challenges for black Marines is to help them try—and succeed at—difficult tasks. He suggested that OCS should, in part, build people up and emphasize their abilities at the beginning of the course. Once they are more comfortable, bring on the stress. More will succeed that way. Furthermore, additional training in relatively weak areas should be treated as a challenge, not as remediation. Remedial programs give the impression that officers cannot succeed without special help. Instead, for officers lacking experience at swimming or other skills, the Marine Corps should emphasize its confidence that the officer can meet the challenge and learn the skills needed to perform the task.

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The need for minority role models at OCS and TBS was also discussed. Lt. Col. Davis and General Russell spoke of the need to ensure that well-qualified leaders of color (not tokens) be placed in highly visible positions of responsibility.

To develop an informal support network, both schools recently initiated mentoring programs. Officer mentors are available to meet with officers or candidates to talk about their problems. Those candidates or officers interested in the mentoring program can decide which officer mentor they want to talk to.

Also, placing minority role models in responsible positions—whether in recruiting or elsewhere in the Marine Corps—signals minority Marines and potential Marines that the Corps will give them a fair chance to succeed. Having minority officers on the staff at OCS and TBS is critically important. When minority leaders are visible, minority candidates and young officers can feel that they belong in the Marine Corps—that they can make it. The commanding officer of OCS has requested additional minority officers, which would increase the proportion from 3 percent to 10 percent. At TBS, 12 percent of the officer staff are minorities.

Successful completion of OCS and TBS does not guarantee a successful career. New officers in the fleet and in the air wings also need role models. Disproportionately concentrating minority officers in recruiting and training at the expense of other areas of the Marine Corps might reduce the mentoring role that more senior minority officers provide to young officers.

In its efforts to achieve these goals, the Marine Corps must weigh the relative importance of minorities in each of these roles. The number of minority officers is still quite small. The Corps must determine the benefit of adding minority OSOs to increase the number of minority officer candidates. Will this be more beneficial than placing a greater number of minority officers in the fleet where they can serve as a role model to minority enlisted Marines who might make excellent officers? How many minority officers at OCS and TBS is enough?

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## **Deemphasized contributions of minorities**

### **Explanation**

One of the difficulties faced by blacks today is that their legitimate contributions to American society are deemphasized or ignored altogether. The Marine Corps may not be exploiting these contributions in creating an atmosphere more congenial to minorities. For example, a black scientist invented the process for storing and readministering blood plasma to patients losing blood. One common application of this procedure is for Marines on a battlefield. This achievement has not been widely acknowledged. Another example is the naming of Anderson Hall at Quantico. This residence hall is named after a war hero, but few Marines know he was black. The lack of an active acknowledgment of such contributions misses an opportunity to foster black and other minority identification with the Marine Corps.

### **Possible remedies**

Acknowledgment of the contribution of minorities to the Marine Corps should be a part of diversity training. Unlike sensitivity training, diversity training acknowledges diversity as a positive goal for the Marine Corps. Top-down leadership and sustained attention are essential in building diversity training into all levels of professional military education. The Marine Corps already has a well-structured leadership program in place. A diversity curriculum could be woven into this program at all stages: The Basic School, Amphibious Warfare School, and Command and Staff College.

Conference participants did not resolve how best to conduct diversity training. Lt. Col. Davis, the Commandant's advisor on minority issues, has been visiting the other services to learn about their diversity programs. The Coast Guard appears to be the leader in this area. Dr. Steele noted the existence of a lot of self-righteous, counterproductive diversity training programs. Heavy-handed lecturing will not work. General Russell said that he had gained the most from diversity training that incorporated

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small-group role playing and videotape. Exploiting the value of different perspectives and backgrounds is to accept the value of the contribution of others. The purpose of diversity training is not to change values, but to open minds to understanding, respect, and opportunity.

Beginning the training at TBS is essential because that is where the young officer learns how to comport himself or herself. Sustaining diversity training at TBS—expanding the definition of the standard Marine—could result in a change starting at the lower ranks. Both retired generals, however, cautioned that commitment from the top down is needed to make diversity a reality; otherwise, young officers will have it beaten out of them as they move up. The staffs at TBS and OCS need diversity training as well. They are the first Marine role models the young men and women encounter, they must exemplify the Marine Corps officer.

## **The stigma of aptitude waivers**

### **Explanation**

The Marine Corps sets minimum aptitude levels (e.g., SAT or Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB)) for admission into the officer corps. Candidates scoring just below the minimum, however, can get a waiver. Specifically, the ASVAB minimum is 120<sup>5</sup> on the electronics (EL) composite, but waivers may be granted to candidates with scores between 115 and 119. Although considerably more whites than blacks receive waivers, a much higher percentage of blacks than whites get them.

Many conference participants thought that these waivers alone could affect both performance and outcomes. On the performance side, there is evidence from the civilian sector to suggest that waivers for minimum entry standards tend to depress the performance of those receiving the waivers. Dr. Aronson

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5. If the candidate scores less than a combined 1,000 on the SAT, he or she must take the ASVAB.

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cited a controlled experiment, in which a group of women were randomly assigned to two groups. One group was told that it met the minimum standards; the other group was told that its members had been hired with a waiver because they didn't meet the standard. Over time, the group that thought it had been accepted with a waiver performed more poorly than the other group. The mechanism generating the poorer performance is self-doubt. In stressful situations, anything that causes self-doubt tends to be detrimental because the individual questions, "Is it me or the task?" On the outcome side, waivers may serve to validate a majority's presumption that all blacks have been given special treatment. Because of the perception of special treatment, instructors and peers have lower expectations. The lower expectations then increase pressure on the minority of a negative stereotype and bias evaluations downward.

### **Possible remedies**

The Marine Corps could admit exactly the same individuals it does now, but eliminate the waiver. The Corps could reduce the minimum ASVAB EL score to 115, but still apply the same criteria to those in the 115 to 119 range. It could then be as selective with the larger pool. Also, OCS and TBS should reinforce the point that everyone who is admitted into the program is qualified.

## **Voluntary segregation and social isolation**

### **Explanation**

In high-stress situations, it is not uncommon for minorities to cluster in small groups. In the context of the Marine Corps, such voluntary segregation could be detrimental to performance and outcomes. The social isolation that can result from voluntary segregation may hinder minorities from identifying with the larger Marine Corps, which could hurt performance. Another problem may arise because of the peer grading system. One part of the evaluation of candidates and new officers is the peer review. If one small group is socially isolated from the rest, it is

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likely to receive lower peer evaluations (even in the absence of bias). Social isolation may also reinforce “collective ignorance,” that is, individual uncertainty about expectations increased by stress and stereotype vulnerability.

### **Possible remedy**

General Russell noted that the University of Maryland School of Engineering tries to cluster minority students in first-year classes and that he believes such clustering is beneficial. Such groupings promote the formation of support networks and help reduce stress. However, other participants in the conference observed that such groups can be detrimental if maintained for too long and, at some point, must make the transition to a multi-ethnic group; otherwise, they will undermine the cohesiveness of the larger group.

OCS and TBS have either instituted or are considering quite different approaches to the ethnic makeup of groups. The Commanding Officer at OCS has made an effort to assign candidates to groups that are diverse—racially, geographically, by marital status, by prior military experience, and so on. At TBS, the Commanding Officer is considering initial clustering of minority officers.

Several participants believed that the way to break down the social isolation is to expand existing group-oriented evaluation. Group activities in which the score is based on group performance are beneficial for all. The success of the group depends on the success of all in the group, which will help break the collective ignorance mentioned above. Individual Marine officers will realize that they are not the only ones who have not mastered a particular task.

Today, Marines take part in unit exercises and grade each other individually, but the grade of every member of the group should sometimes depend solely on the success of the group, not the individual's contribution to the group. By continuously changing the makeup of the groups, instructors can identify the



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most successful candidates. Group scoring has several advantages:

- Combat is group, not individual, competition. If the grade is contingent on group performance, those Marines with greater abilities have an incentive, as they do in real battle, to think of their buddies' and the unit's fate as integral to their own. Marines will learn more than how to perform their own duties; they will also learn how to teach others and demonstrate leadership to those who know less than they do.
- Individual competition is a "zero sum game" in which one person's misfortune (i.e., doing poorly) makes another look better by comparison. Grading the group activity eliminates this undesirable consequence of individual grading systems.
- Teaching in diverse groups teaches individuals to exploit comparative advantages and individual strengths. Marines can benefit from teaming to make use of the diverse characteristics of their unit's personnel.

Research on cooperation in the classroom shows that prejudice decreases and mutual respect increases when exercises are graded by the group's product and each member of the group has a contribution to make. Dr. Aronson compares giving each member a piece of the group's duties to giving each member a piece of a jigsaw puzzle. The picture becomes clear only after they all fit together. Each piece of the puzzle makes its unique contribution to the whole.

## **Competition for qualified minorities**

### **Explanation**

Many organizations are competing to hire qualified black college graduates. The Marine Corps may not be using the same technique applied by successful organizations.

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### **Possible remedies**

To show their interest, representatives of organizations competing for black college graduates attend conferences held by predominantly black organizations. Mr. Wells, a former USMC captain who now does minority recruitment for Nissan, said that he attends meetings of the Urban League, the Congressional Black Caucus, and the NAACP. Although the other armed services are often represented, the Marine Corps never is. He expressed concern that blacks will not consider the Marine Corps as an option because of this lack of visibility.

Another idea for increasing minority recruitment is to tap into enlisted recruiters' contacts with highly qualified high school students. Mr. Sims, another former USMC captain, said that enlisted recruiters initially contact many enlisted prospects in grade 10 or 11—the same time that other competitors for future minority college students make contact. Enlisted recruiters now have a mission for NROTC applications, but their focus is on enlisted recruiting. If enlisted recruiters were given the right incentives, they could steer highly qualified students toward NROTC.

### **Recruiting goals vs. eligible population**

#### **Explanation**

In an effort to increase the representation of minorities in the Marine officer corps, the Marine Corps sets minimum recruiting quotas for minorities. Its present goals are 7.4 percent black, 5.4 percent Hispanic, and 2.4 percent other minorities.

The current aptitude standards severely limit the potential pool for some minorities. The minimum requirements are 1000 on the SAT or 120 on the EL composite of the ASVAB. Each year, for example, only about 5,000 black males nationwide score 1000 or above on the SAT. The Marine Corps seeks 100 black officer accessions each year, or 2 percent of the aptitude-qualified population.

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Thus, the Marine Corps seeks to attract 7.4 percent of its recruits from 2 percent of the eligible population—certainly a difficult task. As a result, OSOs are likely to have less flexibility in choosing among potential black candidates. For example, motivation to become a Marine is surely one factor that determines whether someone will succeed, particularly in the stressful environment of OCS. With qualified whites, OSOs can choose only the most highly motivated, but with the scarcer supply of qualified blacks, they may have to accept some who don't have the burning desire to suffer through OCS. Differences in OCS outcomes might reflect unobserved<sup>6</sup> differences in motivation or other characteristics measuring potential for the Marine Corps.

### **Possible remedies**

Dr. Pierre mentioned that when he was President of Prairie View A&M University, AROTC and NROTC units were on campus, and the AROTC program received much greater interest because the minimum aptitude cutoff was lower for that program. The Army has a minimum aptitude requirement of 850 on the SAT; the Navy sets its minimum at 950.

Some participants felt that the aptitude score cutoff was too high because (1) many different characteristics contribute to the success of officers and (2) SAT scores correlate well only with early college success, not career success. Dr. Pierre pointed to the results of an MIT study of chief executive officers (CEOs) that found that when it lowered its minimum SAT score standards, it admitted students with broader talents. More became CEOs. At higher standards, most students went into academics. Also, a number of very competitive universities set low minimum SAT cutoffs and then look at many other factors in making their selection decisions.

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6. Unobserved in this context does not mean unobserved by the recruiters, only unobserved in the statistical sense that data are not collected on a candidate's degree of motivation or other characteristics measuring potential for the Marine Corps.

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CNA's statistical analysis found no statistically significant relationship between aptitude test score and successful completion of OCS, except for candidates with aptitude waivers. This result isn't surprising given that OCS provides principally physical challenges. These individuals had predicted attrition probabilities that were 5 percentage points higher than for other candidates. At TBS, SAT scores were found to affect expected overall class rank. The effect is not large: an officer with an SAT score of 1100 is expected to rank 5 percentage points higher than an officer with a score of 1000.

The Marine Corps sets high aptitude standards because it believes test scores are positively correlated with later performance. Dr. Pierre contested this presumption, asserting that the use of a high minimum SAT cutoff was unjustified because studies have shown that SAT scores are positively correlated only with performance in the freshman year of college—the relationship weakens rapidly after that. Thus, it is, at best, a short-term predictor of success in an academic setting. These study findings support CNA's research results that show no relationship between aptitude test scores and promotion to captain and major.

Given that the Marine Corps is seeking individuals with leadership qualities beyond those measured by the SAT, it may be unproductive to eliminate so many potential candidates through aptitude testing. Mr. Sims thought that the Marine Corps should use a scoring system similar to that at the Naval Academy, which incorporates the many factors included in considering potential candidates. Another participant stated that the interview was a very important factor in the selection of NROTC candidates. It was believed that the Marine Corps now, in fact, uses multiple factors as well as the results from the interview in selecting potential candidates, but only for applicants meeting the present aptitude limitations.

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## Unofficial culture

### Explanation

There may be an unofficial culture within the Marine Corps that makes it difficult for minorities to feel they are full members of the group without abandoning aspects of their own cultural background.

All of the black former Marines present spoke about the narrowness of the Marine Corps culture. They agreed there was some validity to the discussion on a recent *60 Minutes* television program about the need for blacks to conform to this culture to succeed in the Marine Corps. A particular style of dress was expected: khakis, polo shirts, and deck shoes. Those wearing jeans or silk shirts off duty were subject to ridicule or chastisement from senior officers. The ban against moustaches was another example of needless insistence on conformity. Although all of corporate America expects conformity to some extent, the Marine Corps' unofficial conformity may take it too far.

The group also felt that the environment at the officers' club was inhospitable to blacks. General Walls mentioned his discomfort at often being the only black in the officers' club who wasn't serving food. Another complaint was the selection of music on the jukebox—typically limited to country and western music. Several participants hoped that the Marine Corps would act to limit the dominance of a de facto majority culture in Marine Corps spaces and activities. They felt it was important for the Marine Corps to consciously be more inclusive in the everyday cultural signals it sends. It should confine its requirements for conformity to things that are relevant to mission performance.

Along similar lines, the commanding officer at TBS told of a situation (which has since been corrected) involving pictures of Marine medal winners in the TBS hallways. All the pictures were of white Marines, which may send minority officers the message that they did not belong in the Marine Corps—that they were not “hero material.”

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### **Possible remedies**

Participants agreed on the need for a strong commitment to diversity in the Marine Corps from the top down. Both Dr. Pierre and General Russell noted that the armed services are ahead of the rest of society in race relations. Brigadier General Russell recommended that the Marine Corps, though not under siege, take advantage of the opportunity to be proactive. Because the Marine Corps does not hire people at mid-career, it must begin building its leaders of the 21st century now.

A prime motivator for top Marine Corps leadership's interest in commitment to diversity would be the positive impact that this commitment has on readiness. Participants felt that a greater appreciation of Marines' diverse backgrounds will enhance unit cohesiveness. Also, a Marine officer corps with racial representation that is more in line with the representation in the enlisted ranks will build improved readiness.

Dr. Steele noted that the Marine Corps already does a lot of things well. He pointed out that the Marine Corps is not unique in experiencing some problems and counseled against reacting defensively. Rather, it should mount a thoughtful effort to improve the success rates of minority officers by learning from the mistakes made by other institutions, such as academia.

The military has an advantage in implementing change because leaders can *order* that change be made. General Walls emphasized that leadership must first acknowledge the problems—the problem of attracting minority officers, the problem of differential performance by minorities at OCS and TBS, the problem of lower rates of promotion of minorities—and then attack them through Total Quality Leadership.<sup>7</sup> The armed services successfully fought the problems of rampant drug abuse

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7. Total Quality Leadership is the military's adaptation of the Deming concept of Total Quality Management to its organizational goals and structure.

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and hard-core racism in the 1960s and '70s. A comparable effort should be mounted on behalf of diversity now. Mr. Wells agreed that acknowledging the problem was the first step. He recounted several instances in his career when leaders denied that diversity existed in the Marine Corps. He felt the problem was trivialized by the attitude that all Marines were "green"—some light green, some dark green.

Several participants noted that programs to combat racial problems had been implemented before, but that the efforts never seemed to last. For example, a study in the early 1980s of minorities in the Marine officer corps reached many of the same conclusions and recommendations made by the CNA study a decade later. General Walls pointed out that human relations programs and training instituted in the 1960s had beneficial effects but died away. General Russell said that he benefited from periodic refresher training in diversity while in the Air Force. Because a long lead time is needed to solve the problem of low numbers of minority officers in the senior leadership, sustained efforts are required.

It might be useful to incorporate diversity standards into Inspector General and command inspections. Such incorporation would indicate that diversity is a priority of top leadership and would ensure sustained attention throughout the Marine Corps.

The Marine Corps has made some institutional changes that should help to keep attention focused on the need to increase and promote diversity. General Walls pointed out that the Commandant has upgraded the equal opportunity branch, and has given it increased responsibility to implement diversity training programs.

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## **Summary**

The conference produced a rich set of ideas and suggestions for the Marine Corps. We summarize them below.

### **Build on the Marine Corps' current strengths**

The Marine Corps has done as well as or better than the private sector and academic institutions at providing opportunities for minorities. It should now commit to maintaining standards of excellence (*esprit de corps*). It can do so by (1) establishing team and group orientation (much like team sports) and (2) promoting the recruitment theme of becoming one of the best (in accordance with Steele's idea of challenge, not remediation). The traditional respect accorded Marines is not just talk—it achieves results.

### **Build officer candidates' self-confidence wherever possible**

Encourage the mentor programs to provide support for officers; encourage development of minority leaders in the Marine Corps so that minority candidates have role models; score group performance more often, as opposed to just individual performance; and place a significant number of role models in positions of responsibility with access to young officers.

### **Fully prepare candidates for OCS and TBS**

Give candidates a detailed description of what is expected of them; give minorities more time before OCS; hold OSOs accountable for candidates' success at OCS; and encourage candidates to take swim classes in college.

### **Expand the pool of potential officers**

Encourage black enlisted personnel to apply to become officers; lower aptitude standards; take advantage of schedule flexibility to remove unnecessary barriers to success, such as the



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early swim test; and begin contacts with potential minority officers in the 10th or 11th grades, as the Army and Air Force do.

### **Eliminate policies that stigmatize minorities**

Eliminate aptitude waivers; lower cutoffs in aptitude scores, but retain other qualitative selection criteria; develop a program of diversity training that touts diversity as being good for the Marines; and be sure that programs such as the mentor program are open to all Marines, not just minority candidates.

### **Involve top leaders in the Marine Corps**

A strong commitment to diversity must be conveyed from the top down. Efforts must be sustained given that the USMC must grow its own leaders.

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## **Appendix A:**

### **Biographical sketches of panel members and lists of other participants**

#### **Panel members**

*Elliot Aronson* is Professor of Psychology at the University of California, Santa Cruz. He has successfully applied theories of social psychology to real-world problems. Most notable is Dr. Aronson's "jigsaw method" of group learning, which views learning as putting together a puzzle, with each person contributing a piece of the solution. This approach has been used to increase respect (of self and others) and cohesion at schools that are undergoing racial integration.

*Percy A. Pierre* is Vice President for Research and Graduate Studies and Professor of Electrical Engineering at Michigan State University. He has also served as Assistant Secretary of the Army, President of Prairie View A&M University, and Dean of the Engineering School at Howard University. In the 1970s, Dr. Pierre organized the National Fund for Minority Engineering Students and managed a major national study on minorities in engineering. He brought to the conference extensive practical experience on increasing minority participation in higher education and the engineering profession. He is currently a member of the Board of Trustees of The CNA Corporation.

*Horace L. Russell* served in the Air Force for 30 years until his retirement at the rank of Brigadier General in 1988. While in the Air Force, he earned a Ph.D. in mechanical engineering and taught at the Air Force Institute of Technology and the Industrial College of the Armed Forces. He also served in high-ranking strategic and national security roles. He currently is Associate Dean of the College of Engineering at the University of Maryland, where he has helped develop programs to support female and minority students.

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*Claude M. Steele* is Professor of Psychology at Stanford University. His research concerns the reasons for lower performance by black and female college students. His most recent work has set up experimental programs to help inoculate students against the motivational consequences of negative stereotypes. He, along with Dr. Aronson, brought insights into creating learning environments designed to convey respect for the abilities of all and to create an atmosphere conducive to success.

*George H. Walls, Jr.*, served as a combat engineer in the Marine Corps until his retirement at the rank of Brigadier General in 1993. Among his assignments were tours as an officer selection officer and as commanding officer of an NROTC unit, as well as command of the 2nd Force Service Support Group. He currently is Special Assistant to the Chancellor, North Carolina Central University. Along with Brigadier General Russell, he brought the experience of a long and successful military career.

*Terron Sims* and *Tony Wells*, former Marine Corps captains, offered insights based on their recent experiences in the USMC. *Mr. Sims* graduated from Tulane University in 1975 and served in the Marine Corps from 1976 to 1991. His positions included infantry company commander and officer selection officer. He currently is an Employee Development Specialist at the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office. *Mr. Wells* also served as an infantry officer. He graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy in 1986 and left the Marine Corps in 1992. His positions included infantry company commander and public affairs officer for the western recruiting region. He is currently Manager of Corporate Communications at Nissan North America.

### **Other participants**

The morning session at Officer Candidate School (OCS) and The Basic School (TBS) included briefings by:

- Col. Peter Osman, Commanding Officer, OCS
- Col. James Conway, Commanding Officer, TBS.

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Two Marine Corps officers attended the conference:

- Lt. Col. Alphonse Davis, Headquarters, Marine Corps
- Capt. David Samples, Marine Corps Combat Development Command.

Participants from CNA were as follows:

- Adebayo Adedeji, Project Director and Member of Research Staff
- Col. Tom Bowditch, USMC (Retired)
- Neil Carey, Project Director and Member of Research Staff
- Donald Cymrot, Director, Manpower and Medical Program
- Maj. James Doll, USMC, Marine Corps Liaison Officer
- James North, Project Director for Minority Officer Study
- Karen Smith, Member of Research Staff on Minority Officer Study
- Dinah Sunday, Editor, Professional Services Staff
- Frederick Thompson, Vice President, Acquisition and Support Division.

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## **Appendix B:**

### **Topics for further research**

The following questions suggest areas for further research:

1. What kind of incentive system might give OSOs credit for recruiting candidates that make it through OCS and TBS, without unduly penalizing the OSOs? To what extent would giving black officer candidates more information truly repel them from the Marine Corps?
2. To what extent could the time between recruitment and entry into OCS be increased for the sake of giving minority candidates time to prepare mentally and physically?
3. If the Marine Corps wants to tap prior enlisted personnel to go into OCS, at what time in their careers should this take place? How large would the potential applicant pool be, and what would the effect be on promotion opportunities in the Marine enlisted ranks and officer ranks? What would be the characteristics of Marine Corps enlisted who would be interested in becoming officers? How should the program be structured to address the concern that the best enlisted personnel would be taken before they reach the very productive NCO stage of their careers? And how could the program be advertised to make sure that minority enlisted personnel are given full knowledge of the opportunity, and are encouraged to seriously consider the opportunity? To what extent should the program be limited in terms of the age range for which enlisted personnel should be considered as officer candidates?
4. If the Marine Corps wants to consider changing its cut-offs in officer aptitude scores and eliminating waivers, what strategy would accomplish the goal of eliminating minority stigmatization, while still selecting officer candidates that have a high likelihood of success? Are there lessons from early times in Marine Corps history, or from

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other services, that would provide important information for the Marine Corps to consider in making decisions about its officer standards?

5. What does research say about the curriculum, instructors, and experiences that best prepare leaders in military and other settings?
6. Minority Marines are needed to serve as role models to new officer candidates, but serving in such positions may impair the minority's upward mobility. What can be done to alleviate this problem?
7. Is it advisable to rely on peer evaluations to such a great extent? What alternatives does the Marine Corps have to peer evaluations, and what are the advantages and disadvantages of those approaches?

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